

A FIELD GUIDE TO MURRE BILL LOADS

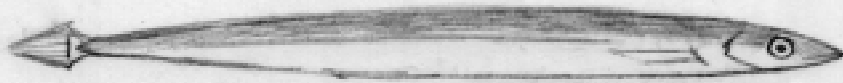
The following sketches were made by Ramiel Papish, a talented artist working on the Cook Inlet Seabird and Forage Fish (CISeaFFS) Project in summer, 1996. Ram took a “field guide” approach to drawing fishes commonly carried by adult Common Murres to their chicks at Duck Island, on the west side of Cook Inlet. These sketches illustrate the key field marks likely to be seen by observers using binoculars or telescopes. The eleven species illustrated here are the most common observed at Duck Island, but this does not include all species likely to be observed in Cook Inlet, or other areas of Alaska. However, this guide serves as a very useful starting point for a practical field guide. If you, or others in your group, have any artistic talent, we would encourage you to draw similar sketches for additional species so that we can add to the guide and make it more comprehensive for future use. Other seabirds for which similar sketches could be made include guillemots and puffins. At the end of your field season, please forward your sketches to one of the following people:

John Piatt, CISeaFFS Project, Alaska Science Center, BRD/USGS, 1011 E. Tudor Rd., Anchorage, AK 99503. 907 786-3549

Vernon Byrd, Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, USFWS, 2355 Kachemak Bay Drive, Homer, AK 99603. 907 235-6546

David Irons, Migratory Bird Management, USFWS, 1011 E. Tudor Rd., Anchorage, AK 99503. 907 786-3376

A Field Guide to COMU Bill Loads - Duck Is 1996



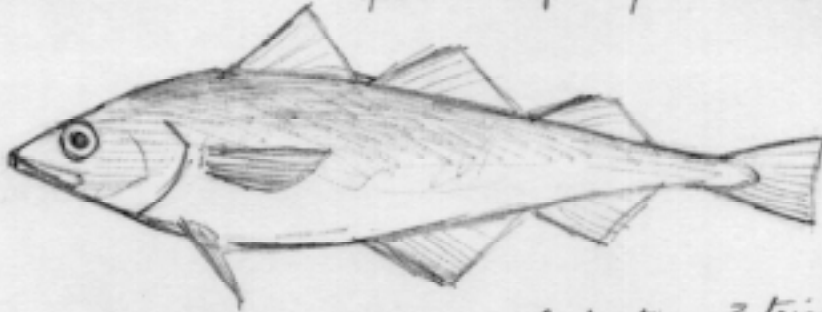
Introduction -

This field guide is designed to assist in identifying prey in murre's beaks observed from a distance. We've commented on the aspects we find useful for identification. This guide is not comprehensive - it includes only the species we identified at Duck Island in 1996.

If you currently know nothing about fish - fear not. When I arrived in AK I was met by a boat called "The Sandlance." I thought it was a cool name for a boat - only later did I learn there is also a fish species called "sandlance." Never the less I have become useful for fish ID and learned enough to put out the following field guide.

This brings me to my next point: this field guide was not assembled by experts and may have some flaws. Still we feel this guide will be useful. Good luck! - RP

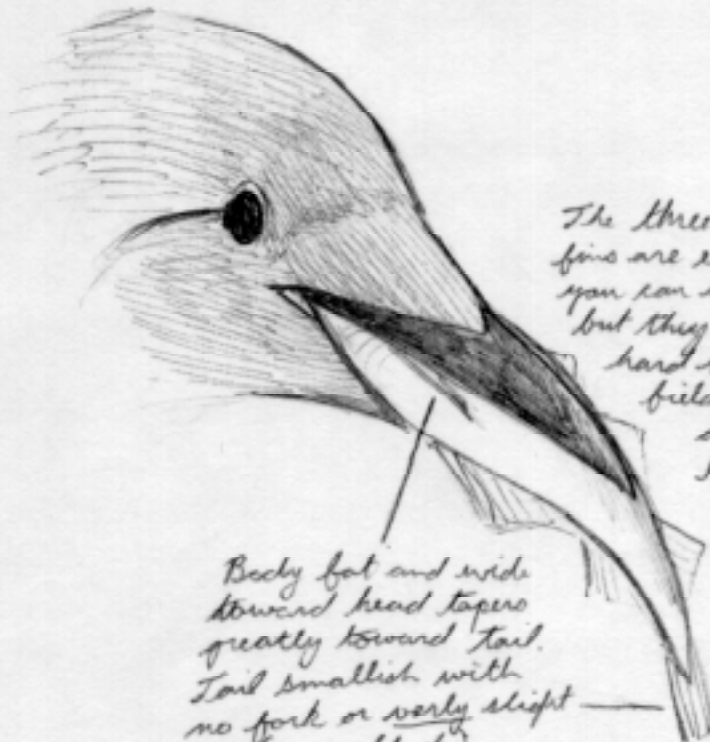
"Meaty" body, pale tones tend to be tannish. Generally appears pale and plump in the beak



Distinctive - 3 triangular dorsal fins and 3 triangular anal fins

Gadid - includes rods and pollock. We didn't attempt to separate these in the field

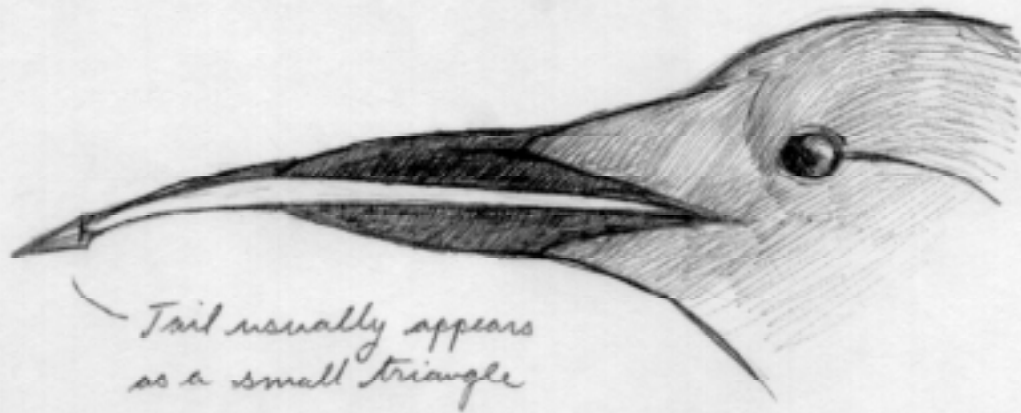
GADID



The three dorsal fins are excellent if you can see them, but they are often hard to see in the field esp. at a distance.

If you just make out one dorsal or anal fin the triangular shape is useful

Body fat and wide toward head tapers greatly toward tail. Tail smallish with no fork or very slight fork (in pollock). These features very useful



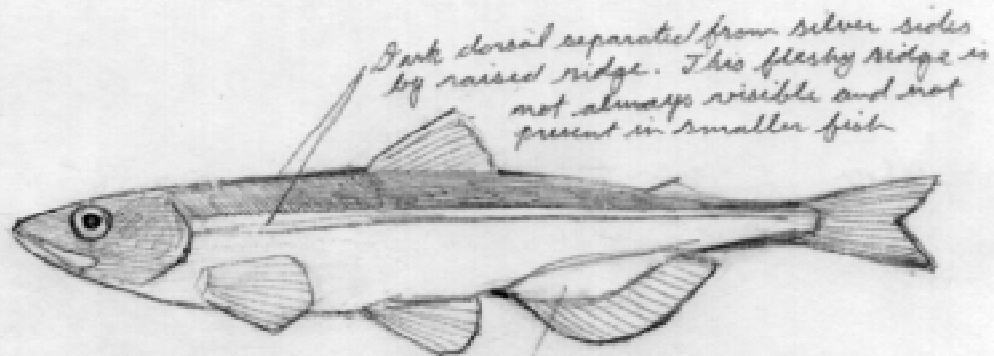
Sand lance

SANDLANCE

*Slim, stiff body with dark
blue-green to golden dorsal*



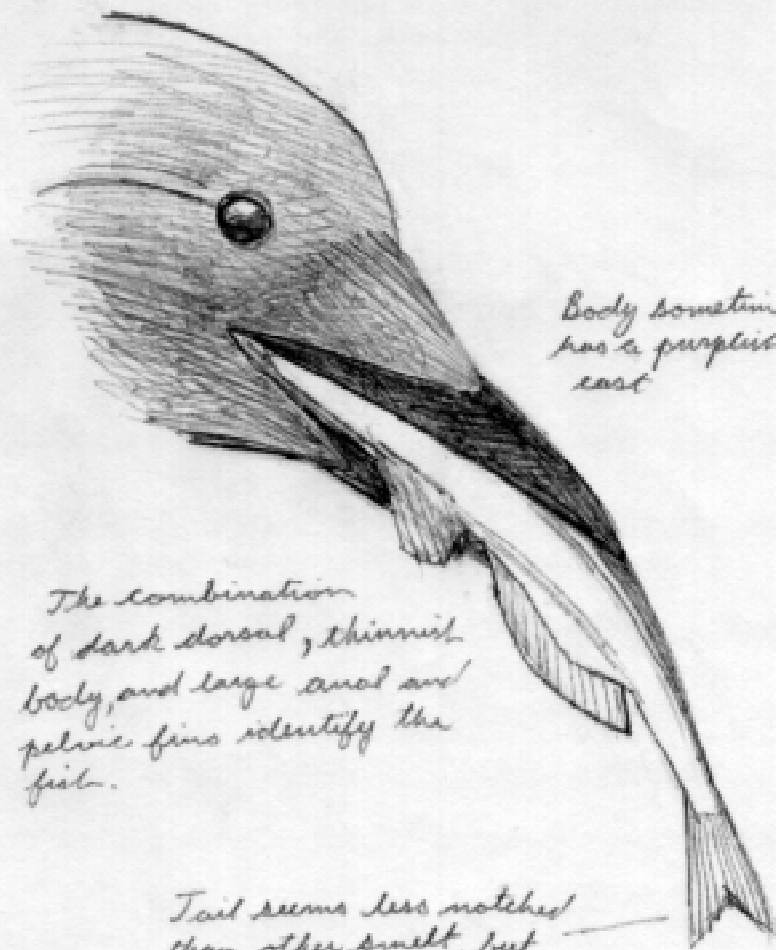
*Long dorsal and anal fins present
but generally not visible*



Dark dorsal separated from silver sides by raised ridge. This fleshy ridge is not always visible and not present in smaller fish

Capelin

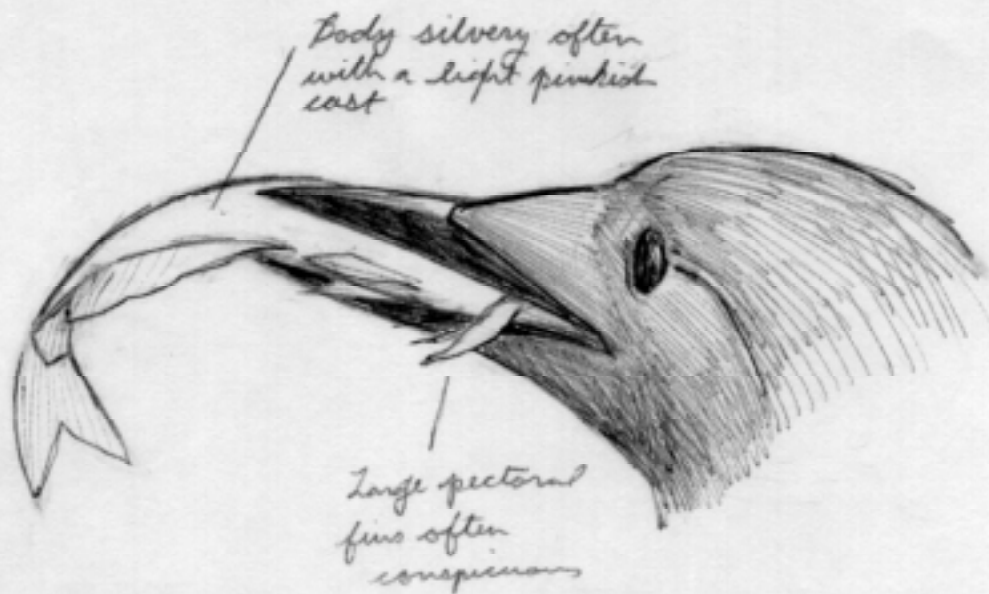
This piece of flesh at the base of the anal fin sometimes visible (and helpful)



Body sometimes has a purplish cast

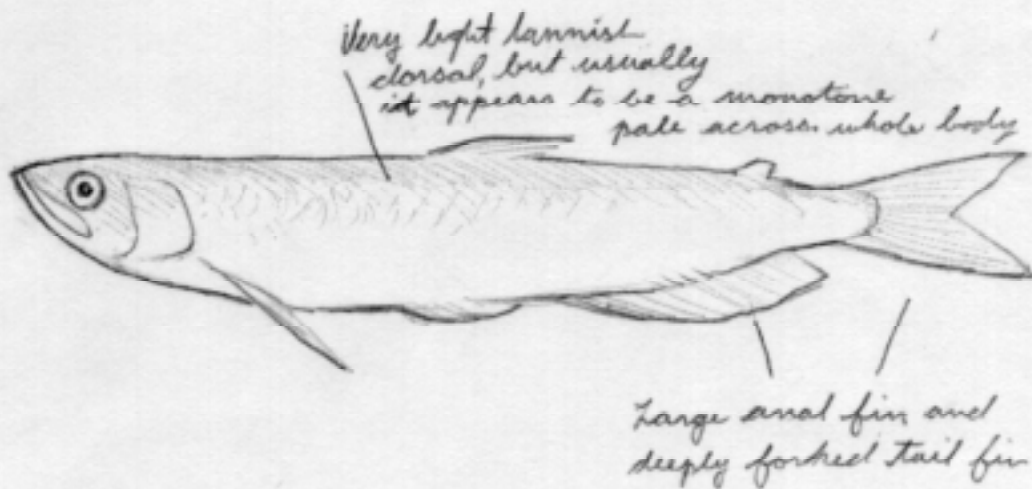
The combination of dark dorsal, thinish body, and large anal and pelvic fins identify the fish.

Tail seems less notched than other smelt, but you'll only have to look at this if you don't see dorsal side.



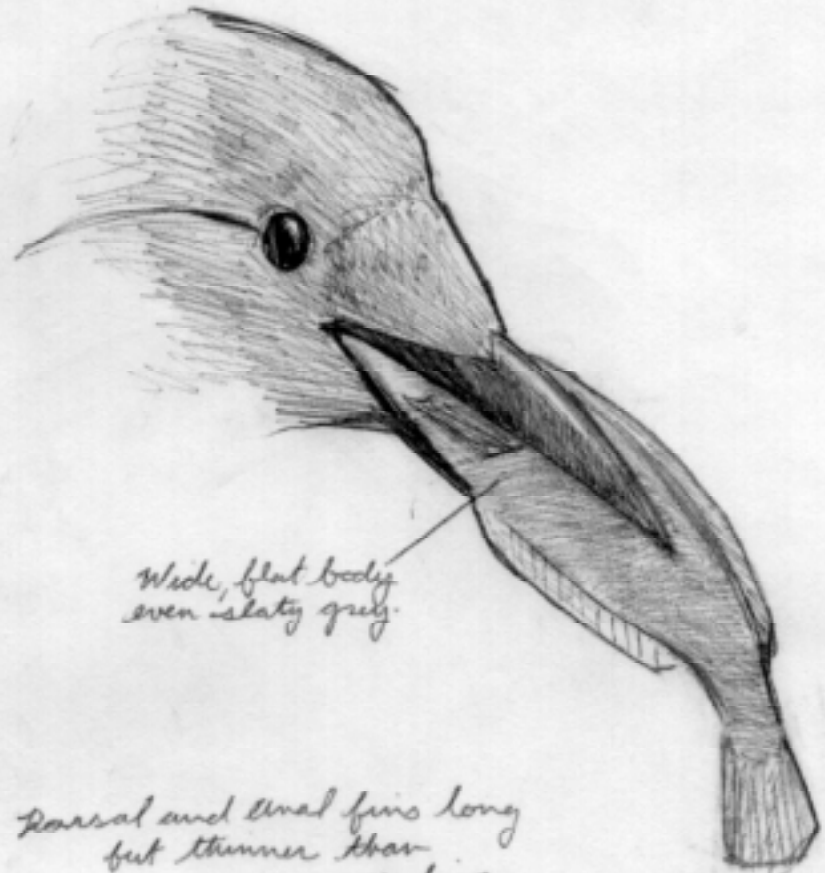
Eulachon?

EULACHON



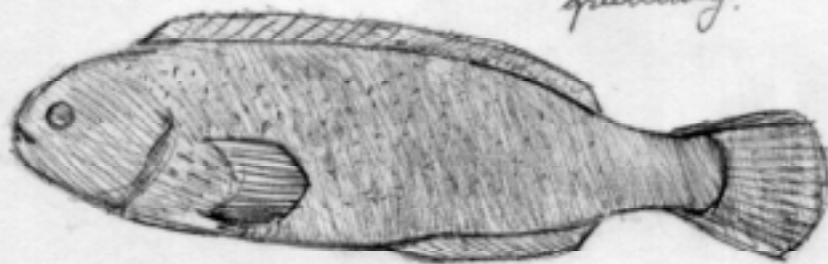
Prowfish

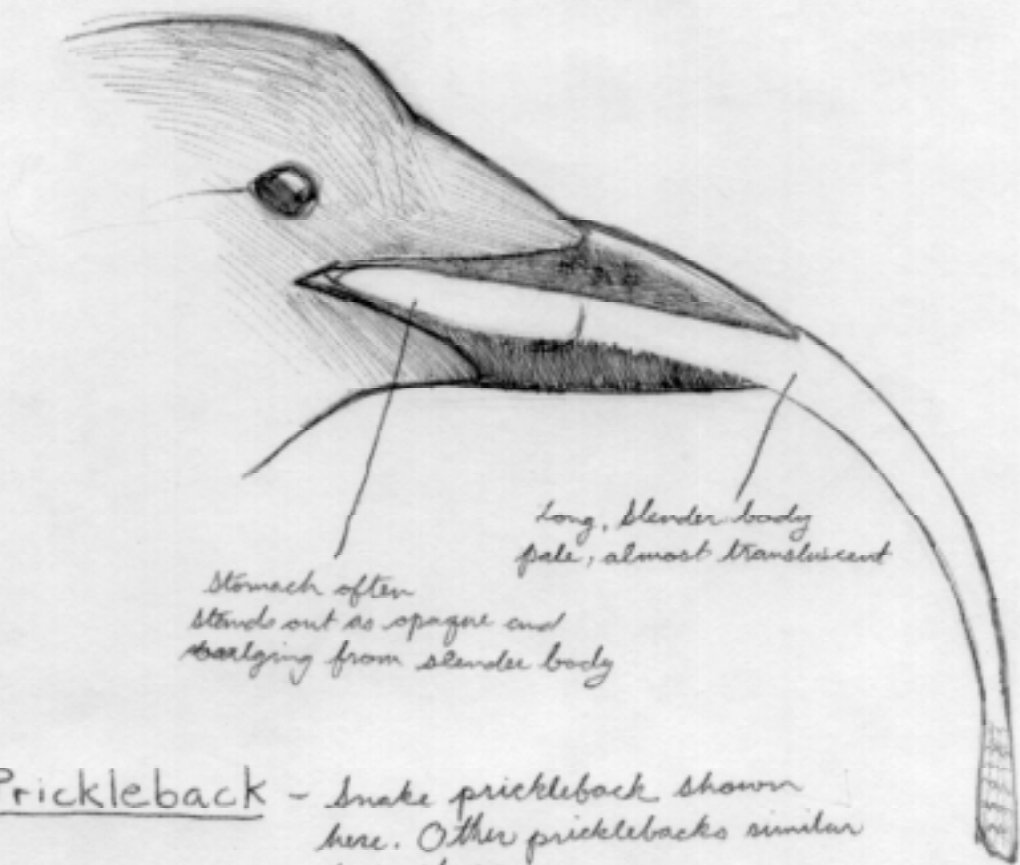
PROWFISH



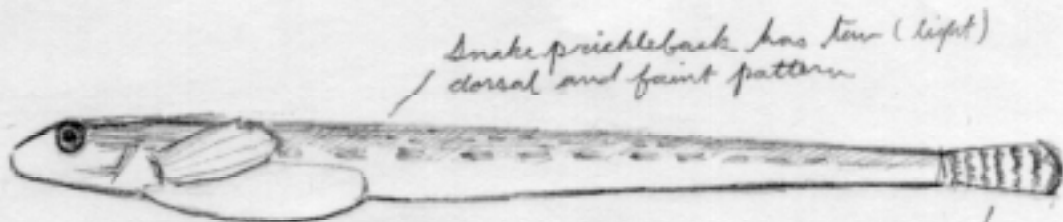
Wide, flat body
even slaty grey.

Dorsal and anal fins long
but thinner than
greenling.





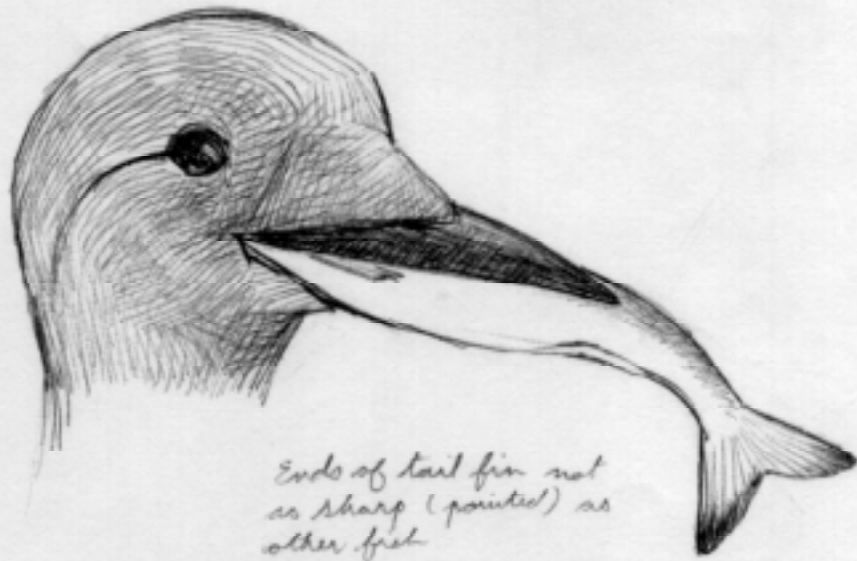
Prickleback - Snake prickleback shown here. Other pricklebacks similar body shape.



SNAKE PRICKLEBACK has ten (light) dorsal and faint pattern

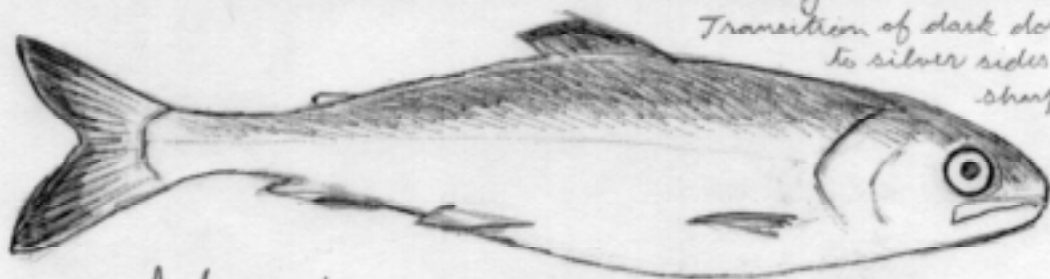
SNAKE PRICKLEBACK has tail stripes often visible a close range

PRICKLEBACK



Ends of tail fin not
as sharp (pointed) as
other fish

Salmonid



Dorsal bluish turns gradually
into shiny silver sides.

Transition of dark dorsal
to silver sides not
sharp as in
Caplin

Salmon fins
often edged in dark
We don't know if this
is on all Salmon or
just the ones commonly
taken by our COMU's.

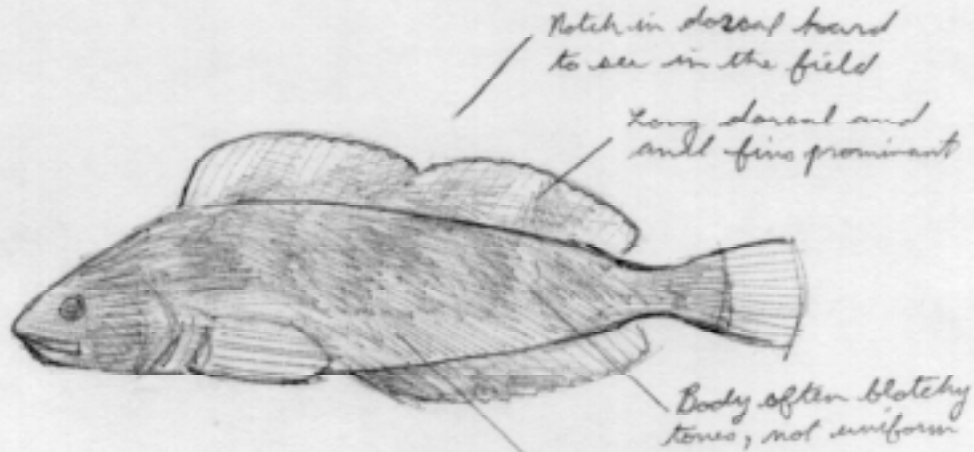
Eye large and
head snubb-shaped
- good luck seeing
it though

SALMON

GREENLING

Greenling

- we haven't been separating greenling species in the field

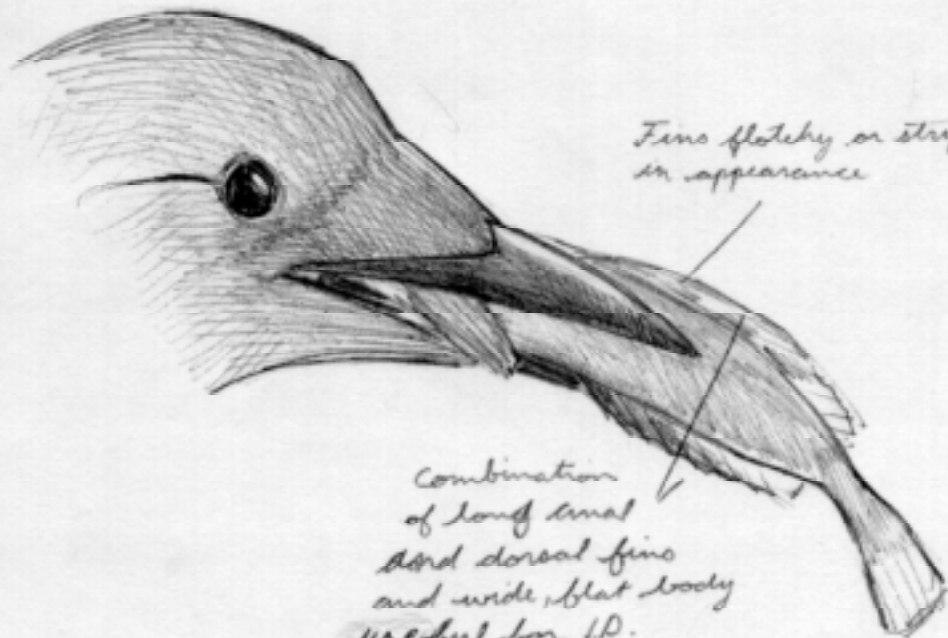


Notch in dorsal fin
to see in the field

Long dorsal and
anal fins prominent

Body often blotchy
tones, not uniform

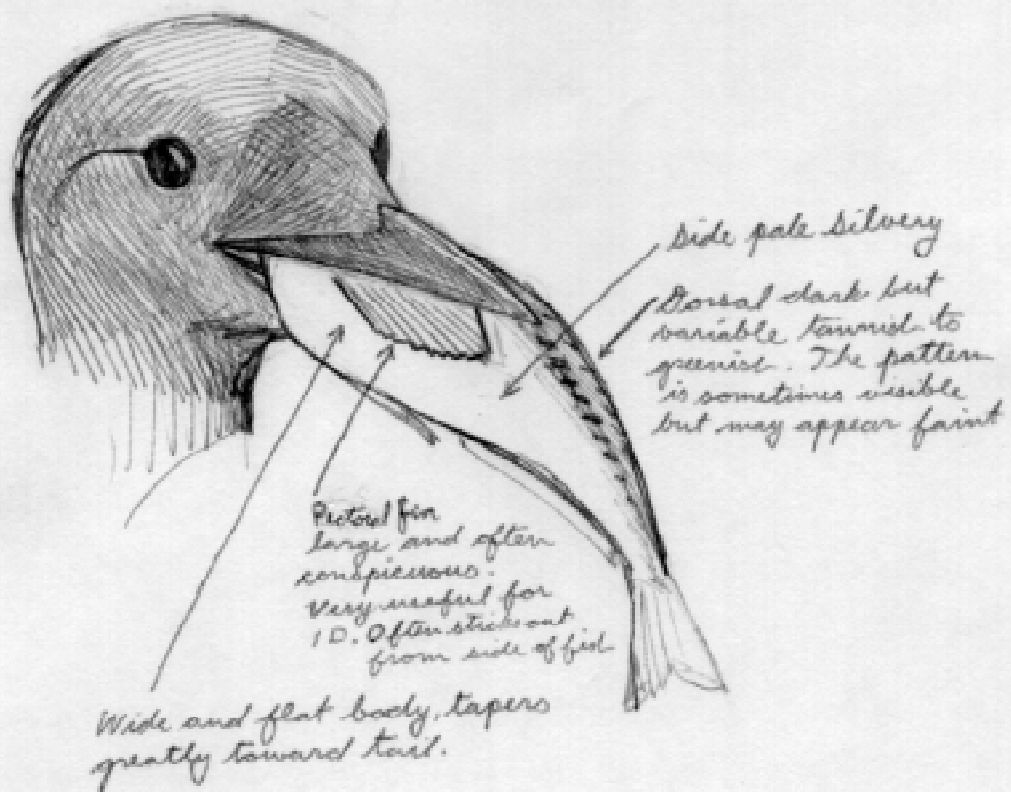
Body color variable
usually looking reddish-
brown. Prowfish
also flat with long
anal and dorsal fins.
However, fins smaller
and whole fish slaty and
uniform in color



Fins blotchy or striped
in appearance

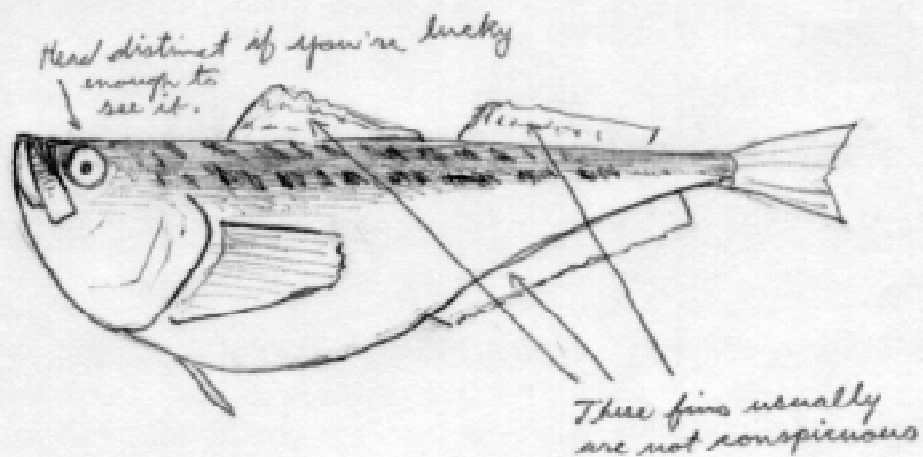
Combination
of long anal
and dorsal fins
and wide, flat body
useful for I.D.

Seeing just this portion
difficult to tell from slightly
slimmer lingcod.



Pacific Sandfish

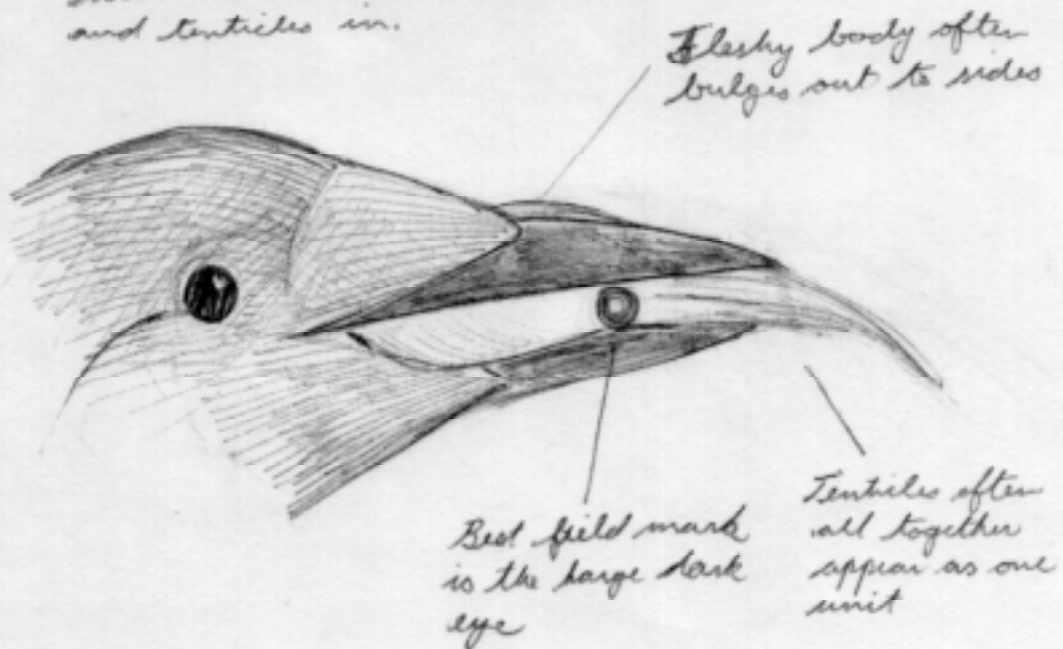
SANDFISH

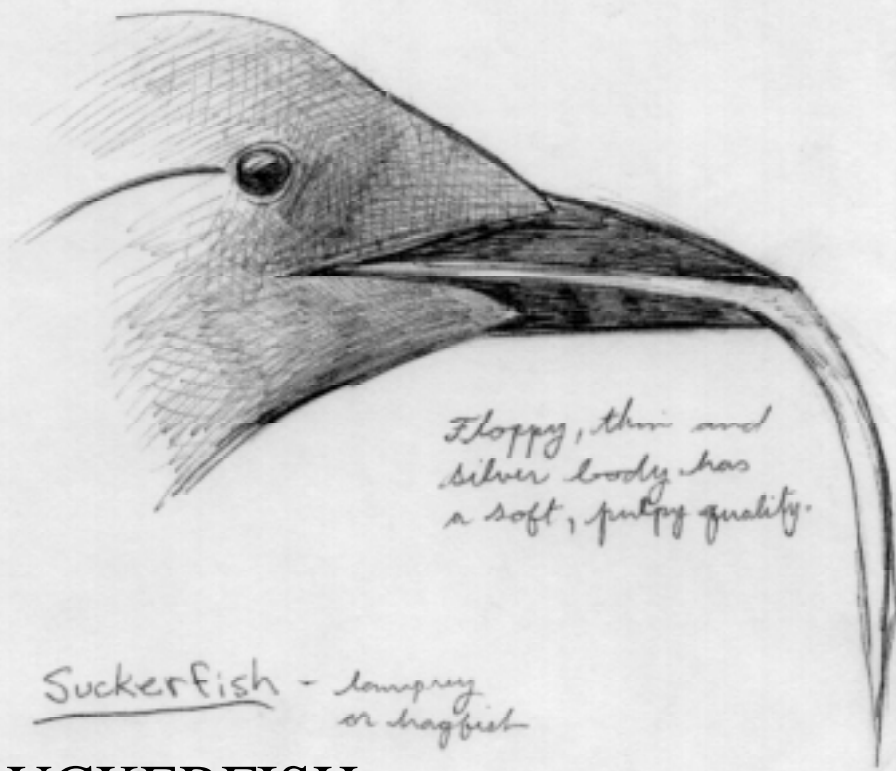


SQUID

Squid - if your initial reaction
is "what the hell is that?"
good chance it's a squid.

note: we've seen murre
holding squid both
directions - tentacles out
and tentacles in.





Floppy, thin and
silver body has
a soft, pulpy quality.

Suckerfish - lamprey
or hagfish

fin sometimes
visible

SUCKERFISH

Body uniform grey-silver

